



## Poverty alleviation through women empowerment: Kudumbashree mission's a journey to gender friendly environment for further diversification

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### Abstract

Kudumbashree is a women centric, community-based, poverty extermination project of government of Kerala and its State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM). The purport of Kudumbashree in Malayalam is prosperity of the family. Kudumbashree mission intent on to ensure that the woman does not abide to remain a passive receivers of public/family assistance. The key peculiarity of Kudumbashree is its democratic leadership. Kudumbashree mission made many provisions and programs to ensure a gender friendly environment to achieve this objective and they sought to develop women's insightful leaderships for a sustainable empowerment. The mission was aimed at alleviation of poverty via empowerment of women. To a great extent Kudumbashree mission succeeded to ensure the accomplishment of their mission's creation objective by ensuring their participation in Ayalkoottam (neighbourhood groups) by encouraging their entrepreneurial and other activities. This study is aiming to analyze Kudumbashree mission journey of twenty-one years to have an understanding on the diversification strategies for further enhancement. Standardization of Kudumbashree mission's activities and percent condition will be helpful for the mission to set skill enrichment and enlargement activities of members of Kudumbashree. This study is trying to evaluate the current position of Kudumbashree for portraying the limitations of it to create a more effective functioning of Kudumbashree.

**Keywords:** kudumbashree mission, ayalkoottam (NHG), Kerala, sustainable women empowerment, gender friendly environment, skill enrichment and enlargement, diversification

### Introduction

Kudumbashree, Perhaps one of the predominant women network of the globe. Kudumbashree started its functioning in the year 1997 based on the recommendations of a three-member Task Force committee selected by the government of Kerala. It was molded in the background of decentralization of power to the local self-governments (Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI)) and the People's Plan Campaign (PPP campaign). Kudumbashree mission's objective was to eradicate poverty within 10 years of its commencement. The mission has a three-tier mechanism, called (i) Community Development Societies (CDS) at the Panchayati Raj institutions level, (ii) Area Development Societies (ADS) at the mid-level and (iii) Neighborhood Groups (NHG)/Ayalkoottam at the minor level. This was applied on the base of practice gained by Alappuzha municipality and Malappuram. During 2000-2002, this Community Network extended to cover the entire Kerala with in three phases. On March, 2017, Kudumbashree is having an association strength of 43, 69,976 women. This consist of 2, 85,175 NHG, 19,854 ADS and 1073 CDS members.

### Journey to Kudumbashree

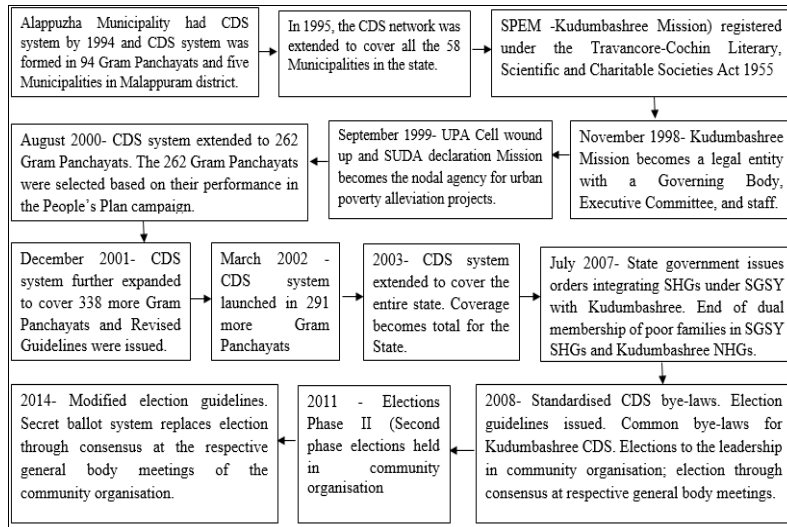
The commencement initiatives for formation of Kudumbashree mission was centered on CDS model. The origin of CDS is originated in the Government of India's

programmes with the assistance of UNICEF named Urban Basic Services (UBS) and the Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP), latter executed by Kerala. Likewise a program called Aleppey Urban Model (Alappuzha Community Based Nutrition Program (IBNP)) started in the year 1987, developed for those who were living in the slums was also considered as a base model for formation of Kudumbashree mission. A three-tiered community structure was projected to empower the poor specifically women was adopted from this model. Another one termed as Malappuram CDS model used the same strategy of Aleppey Urban model for community organisation for the Community Based Nutrition Project (CBNP) and the Poverty Alleviation Programme. This model covered both urban and rural areas and in rural areas the project covered some of the most backward areas of the state and marginalized people.

In 1997, a special task force committee consisting of S.M. Vijayanand, Secretary in authority for the State Urban Poverty Alleviation (UPA) Project Cell, T.M. Thomas Isaac, Member, State Planning Board, and Dr. Prakash Bakshi of NABARD recommended for the setting up of a State Poverty Eradication Mission for creation of Kudumbashree mission. The SPEM (Kudumbashree Mission) was registered under the Travancore-Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act 1955. The recommendations of the Task Force was approved by the State Government. On May 17, 1998 the

then Prime Minister Atal Bihari vajpey inaugurated the mission at Malappuram. On November 1<sup>st</sup> 1998 - the Kerala

Piravy day - Kudumbashree Mission became a legal entity.



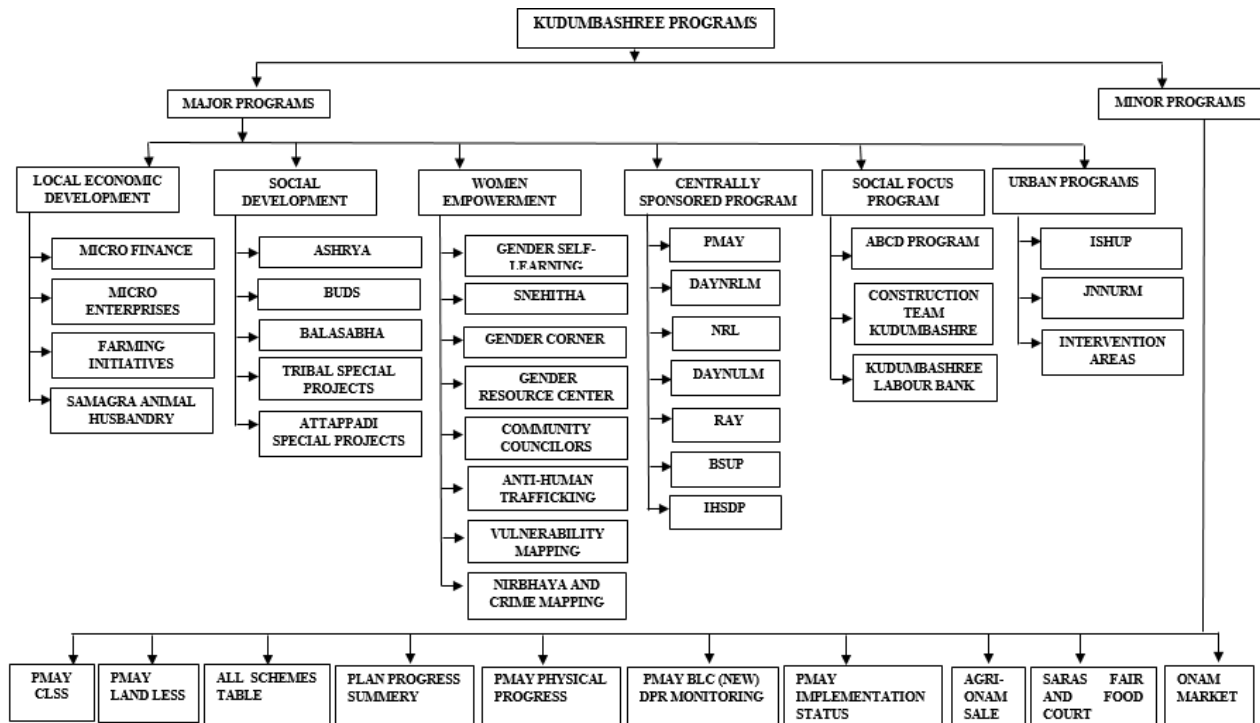
Source: modified figure from Kudumbashree.org

Fig 1: Kudumbashree in years

**Kudumbashree and Programs**

Kudumbashree established an innovative approaches to classify the poor with non-economic scopes. Such marginalized poor women are organized under the network of community organisations (CBOs). Kudumbashree mission developed many programs for the betterment of those women and their families. Central programs of Kudumbashree comprise local economic development, social development,

women empowerment, centrally sponsored programme, special focus programs and urban programs. Under each category, Kudumbashree Mission organizes numerous distinctive programs like Onam markets, food courts, Saras Mela etc. to ensure the participation of women who are not getting enough opportunities to express their skills or sell their products.



Source: modified figure from Kudumbashree.org

Fig 2: Representing programs and activities of Kudumbashree

### Women of Kudumbashree Now

Kudumbashree, the community organization of Ayalkoottam (NHG) women of Kerala, has been recognized as an active approach for women empowerment in both rural and urban zones. Bringing women systematized from all ranges of for their rights, equality and for empowerment. The dictum of making such a mission was to eliminate poverty within 10

years of its formation through women's empowerment. Today, this mission covered many mile posts and at present Kudumbashree is a well organised and around the globe recognised replicable model that facilitated many women to come out of their dwelling to link collected for a creative resolution.

**Table 1:** Kudumbashree member's participation chart

Total number of women participation in Kudumbashree in different forms	Total numbers of members	4306976
	Total number of NHG	277175
	Total number of ADS	19854
	Total number of CDS	1073
Women empowerment initiatives	Gender resource centers	105
	Community counselling centers in block level	75
	Vigilant groups at ward level	14949
	Snehitha gender help desks	14districts
	Community counseling	357(whole state)
	Vulnerability matching and projects	Completed in(27 CDS)
Micro enterprises	Number of enterprises	31261
	Individual enterprises	11777
	Group enterprises	19484
	IT units	63
	Café units	1054
	Swanthanam volunteers	139
	Construction units	50
Micro finance	Total amount of thrift	3722.cr
	Total internal loan	15097.cr
	Total number of NHG's linked	178898
	Total linkage amount	6797.cr
	Total number of NHG's linked -2017	29883
	Linkage amount -2017	1171.cr.
	Instrument subsidy disbursement - 2017	27.71.cr.
Total programs and performances	Total target sanctioned	51773
	Total project cost	393.28.cr
	Training commenced	28991
	Training completed	22159
	Job appointed	15613
	Number of agencies	43
	Number of training centers	67
	Number of foreign placements	52
Number of job mela conducted	38	

*Source:* modified figure from Kudumbashree.org

### Recognitions and Awards for Kudumbashree

Kudumbashree in progress it's functioning with a mission of eliminating absolute poverty via concentrated community action in the leadership of local self-governments through active involvement and participation of women of Kerala. From the year of 1998 to 2017, Kudumbashree gained several awards and acknowledgements from various renowned organisations like UNDP, UN Habitat, UNCHS and several

other. This world noticed replicable model has currently turn out to be the pride for Kerala. And through this mission many downgraded, under fortunate women could recognize their ideas of contribution in social activities, decision making process in their kinfolks and participating elections in local self-government institutions. This mission also assisted several families to come out of poverty and increase their economic and social position.

**Table 2:** Recognitions and Awards

YEAR	AWARDS AND RECOGNITION
1998	UNCHS -100 Best Innovations
2000	CAPAM - International Innovations - Gold Medal
2002	UNDP One among the 15 Best Practices in India
2002	Dubai International Award Finalist
2002	UN Habitat - 2002 Practices Global 100 List
2002	CAPAM - Best 10 Innovations
2006	India Innovation - Award for Social Innovations
2007	Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration
2009	The EMPI-Indian Express Indian Innovation Award
2010	Kerala State E-Governance Award
2011	Excellence in Implementation of JNNURM
2012	Excellence Award - Excellence in Implementation of JNNURM
2012	HUDCO Award for Best Practices to improve the living environment
2013	India International Trade Fair Best Food Court Gold Medal
2013	HUDCO National Award for the best practices in Slum Development
2014	India International Trade Fair Best Food Court Silver Medal
2014	HUDCO National Award for the best practices in Slum Improvement
2016	India International Trade Fair Best Exhibitor Award
2017	Best Performance Award - DDU-GKY
2017	Best Performance Award - Kudumbashree NRO

*Source:* modified figure from Kudumbashree.org

### **Kudumbashree and Diversification for Sustainable Empowerment to a Women Friendly Environment**

After twenty one years of its creation, Kudumbashree mission's covered its growth stage and is in its maturity stage. Number of competition from its rivalries and similar business model are increasing day by day. By politicalizing activities of Kudumbashree, the effectiveness of this model is becoming a question of further enhancement now. It is visible that in many places the creation and participation of Kudumbashree Ayalkoottam activities are shrunken to credit and thrift creation. For further diversification to avoid saturation of this world recognised replicable model, mission has to go for diversification. Based on the age and education status of member women mission has to set different skill repositories to enhance and enrich skill of its members. New tie-ups with similar business model, associations with technical support providers, attracting young participation, diversifying business and marketing models are very essential for it.

One of the major areas were Kudumbashree have to concentrate their attention is technical up gradation of their members. By improving technical knowledge and upgrading technologies used by Kudumbashree for conducting business and marketing of their products, Kudumbashree units can diversify their businesses from their local areas to every nook and corners of the globe. Most of the Ayalkoottam members are still considering this as cluster where they can depend for loan with less interest and thrift a small amount of money. Actually major amount of Ayalkoottams are not utilizing the power and opportunities they have for starting businesses or self-employment activities. Similarly if they are having businesses they are not that using the scope for Facebook or social media or web presents for their business. Not utilizing the

opportunities by women of Kudumbashree is limiting mission from attaining its many goals. Here Kudumbashree mission has to make skill repository and should subdivide the business unit members as technical and production staff. Then training and development has to be done for improvising technical and other side. By having associations with technical start-ups for this can be helpful for Kudumbashree. Now Kudumbashree is associating with many IT companies' corporate social responsibilities activities for creation of mobile application and technical advancement of mission. At the same time the extent of technical assistance Ayalkoottam members are getting is limited. So the mission has to take necessary steps to ensure technical up gradation of Kudumbashree businesses. This can be achieved by linking the activities enterprises, technical start-ups, and technical student bodies.

It is a fact that Kudumbashree was started with the intention of improving the economic as well as social and empowerment status of kitchen-tied females. Many areas still mission need to concentrate for making them capable of conducting businesses. For this it's better to have associations and tie-ups with similar business entities like social enterprises and NGO's then to a considerable extent these targets were fulfilled. In today's context utilizing the scopes of activities of social enterprises should be enhanced for the further enhancement of Kudumbashree micro enterprises. The initiatives of Kerala government to support start-ups and knowledge incubators at every educational institute can fertilize the growth of Kudumbashree further. Participation of students of technical and management colleges in Kudumbashree activities may help the Kudumbashree units to have better idea of technological developments and managerial practices which in turn help the better

management of Kudumbasree activities. As per government figures social enterprises in India contribute billions of rupees to Indian economy.

The Kudumbasree units captures innovative idea and converts that sustainable saleable propositions to bring about economic and social change. Need of mending Kudumbashree to envisage the imaginings and requisites of today's and tomorrow's generation should also be reckoned by Kudumbashree mission. By modifying and granting opportunities to start-up's and students, Kudumbashree can make miracles. Today, the activities of Kudumbashree is confined to just for satisfying the members of Ayalkoottam (NHGs) and its surrounding families. Another major defect is that from each family only one member will be able to be part of Kudumbashree and once that member leave her association with Kudumbashree other will be able to join. Now most of the Kudumbashree members are middle aged and younger participation with Kudumbashree Ayalkoottam is less. Such a scenario having associations with school or colleges knowledge incubators for field visits or project work associations will be beneficial for Kudumbashree to attract young blood to Kudumbashree in future as well. This association's increase participation of all with mission for a better gender friendly environment with sustainable participation of all.

### Conclusion

Kudumbashree mission as a pride institution of Kerala has to deliver its attention to whole the areas including rural, urban and coastal areas of Kerala. In fact, it's right time for Kudumbashree to make sure to ensure this missions maturity position for further advancement to avoid saturation of mission. This replicable world recognised model is having many rivalries from other political parties and by politicking activities of Kudumbashree may make mission and its activities deviate from the creation of objectives. Programs with an aim of poverty mitigation via empowerment of marginalized women has to be stretched to advance a women friendly environment for gender equity and equality of women in Kerala. However mission has developed many programs with this same intension, though this is not that effective and efficiently utilized by many Ayalkoottams all over Kerala. Here attention of actions on technical and modern businesses marketing strategies will help Kudumbashree to achieve its formation objective excellently. But the openings and opportunities in front of Kudumbashree mission are wide and to grab those opportunities, it should equip their members to cope with their global competitors. Agreeing new approaches of business with knowledgeable people and with newest technologies, mission can produce more direct and indirect job opportunities for non-members as well. This will support the mission to exploit more resources and improve the pace of economic growth of the state.

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